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SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 456th MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Tuesday, 19 May 1998, at 3 p.m.

Chairperson: Mrs. KARP

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The meeting was called to order at 3 p.m.

CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS OF STATES PARTIES (agenda item 4) (continued)

Initial report of Hungary (continued) (CRC/C/8/Add.34; HRI/CORE/1/Add.11; CRC/C/Q/HUN/1)

1. At the invitation of the Chairperson, the members of the delegation of Hungary resumed their places at the Committee table.

2. Mrs. PALME asked whether, in view of the large number of teenage pregnancies, there was not a need for more guidance on reproductive health and HIV, and secondly, when ILO Convention No. 138 had been ratified.

3. Mr. RABAH wished to know the age of legal capacity and criminal liability, the age at which a young person could testify before a court and the age of military service. He was puzzled by the definition of a child in Hungarian law, which stated that a person below the age of 18 was a minor unless married. At what age could a young person participate in military conflicts? Why was a youngster under 14 not deemed criminally responsible for petty offences?

4. Mr. KOLOSOV asked if he was right in assuming that a boy could enlist at recruiting offices at 17, but could engage in active service only from the age of 18.

5. The CHAIRPERSON inquired how children could consult a doctor and seek medical advice if they did not want their parents to be present. Could a doctor be sued if he took action without parental consent? Were there any regulations to ensure that doctors could not take advantage of children who were not accompanied to a consultation by their parents or that children did not go to insufficiently qualified doctors? As the age of sexual consent was 14, could someone under the age of 18 apply for a licence to work as a prostitute?

6. Mr. HERCZEGH (Hungary), replying to the last question, said that since prostitution was prohibited, the question did not arise. A bill aimed at regulating the status of prostitutes was being debated in Parliament. Mr. Kolosov was right in his assumption. Turning to the issue of medical consultations, he explained that children could go to their school doctor to seek advice on any subject, at any time, without their parents. Secondly, in all major towns there was a network of counselling services bound by professional secrecy for under-18s who were drug addicts or who had psychological or family problems. Furthermore, many non-governmental organizations (NGOs) provided highly efficient services in that field. The ILO Convention had been ratified at the end of 1997. Teenage pregnancies were a big problem; 50 per cent of all babies whose mothers were under 18 were born out of wedlock. He thought that the best way to deal with the problem was for educational programmes to draw attention to the dangers of childbirth at 14 or 15 and, at the same time, to provide assistance for under-age parents.

7. Ms. WELLER (Hungary) said that the age of criminal responsibility had been set at 14 as a youngster was then considered mature enough to take

responsibility for his or her actions and understand their social implications. Nevertheless, young offenders were treated differently to criminals aged 18 or over.

8. Mrs. PALME asked whether there was an action plan to tackle the issue of early marriages.

9. Mr. HERCZEGH (Hungary) replied that in December 1997 the Coordination Council for Children and Youth Affairs had adopted a Plan of Action on a mental hygiene strategy which covered sexual education in primary and secondary schools. Henceforth more emphasis would have to be placed on the dangers of sexual behaviour and encouraging a responsible attitude to it. As from 1 September 1998, sex education would be a compulsory subject on the national curriculum at all levels.

10. Mr. RABAH requested information about the rights of children born out of wedlock.

11. Mrs. PALME inquired what steps had been taken to promote a wider knowledge of the Convention among the police and magistrates. How were changes in the Roma population going to be monitored? What educational support would be given to Roma children?

12. The CHAIRPERSON sought clarification about the practical impact of the government measures to improve the education of Roma children referred to in the written answers. Noting that the children's services offered by local government authorities differed according to their financial capacity, she asked whether guidelines on minimum standards for the allocation of resources should not be laid down in order to combat discrimination due to a child's place of residence. Was there any research into the causes, prevalence and prevention of the high rate of suicide among children? Legislation on the right of the child to express his views contained the words "in justified cases". What cases were regarded as justified? What steps had been taken to implement the obligation for courts and probation and care services to hold a dialogue with children so that young people could arrive at an informed opinion? What mechanism existed to enable children to lodge complaints in schools, prisons and care institutions? Did legal provisions exist on the subject? How did they work in practice? Did self-governing student bodies participate in disciplinary procedures? What influence did schoolchildren have on the curriculum and administration of their school?

13. Mr. HERCZEGH (Hungary) explained that pupil self-government existed in every school. The umbrella organization was called the Council for Students' Rights and comprised schoolchildren, pupils' organizations and officials from the Ministry of Education and Culture. Consensus must be reached on decisions. Every year, the Ministry organized the "Student Parliament", where every school was represented. It reviewed the implementation of the Students' Charter, which met the requirements of the Convention. There were plans to introduce councils set up solely by the children in all schools. Teachers were required to respect the rights and obligations laid down in the Students' Charter. Children could file complaints with the school council, the parents' council or the ombudsman. The latter had written a much publicized report on the complaints procedure and had been asked to submit a follow-up report.

14. Since the action taken on a complaint was of prime importance, teachers, parents and prospective judges were trained in the spirit of the Convention. "Justified" cases were those in which a public hearing might have adverse psychological consequences and the child could be heard in camera; otherwise children were fully entitled to testify in court. Suicide had long been a problem in Hungary, but happily, over the previous three years the number of suicides had been falling. Studies were being conducted to ascertain the reasons for that trend with a view to ensuring that it continued. Local government bodies, although bound by national laws, received no guidelines on minimum standards because they were keen to preserve their independence and autonomy. The only guidance central Government could provide was in response to appeals concerning grants.

15. With regard to Roma children, he said that the Government was under no illusions about the difficulty of dealing with a problem that had existed since the fourteenth century. Under the auspices of the Ethnic Minorities Office, a unit within the Prime Minister's Office, all schools where ethnic and national minorities were represented received grants and visits aimed at helping them to take concrete action. However, it was too early to draw conclusions from the studies being made of that programme, which was only in its second year.

16. The real answer was to involve the Roma themselves. However, that was turning out to be a long and painful process, as they were represented by three nationwide autonomous groups and by hundreds of local ones; there was no central body with which the Government could establish a dialogue. Its current approach was to try to stay in touch with all of them, but that was hampered by their tendency to hold conflicting views, and to disband and then reform on a different basis.

17. The CHAIRPERSON asked whether the Hungarian delegation could indicate which groups were represented on the Coordination Council, and whether Roma were among them. While she appreciated the Government's difficulties in standardizing local services, it could not be sufficient, under the terms of the Convention, for a Government simply to state that it was delegating responsibilities to bodies which were out of its control. The result would be that individual Roma children would not enjoy the same access to services as children living in neighbouring cities.

18. Mr. HERCZEGH (Hungary) said his Government was well aware that it shared the same obligations as local governments under the terms of the Convention. It requested reports from local governments on the implementation of aspects of the Convention, and also maintained contacts to ensure that children from national or ethnic minorities received grants from local budgets. The matter was complicated by the fact that most locally-elected bodies were not of the same political persuasion as the central Government, with the result that the latter had to tread very carefully with regard to the former's independence.

19. Moreover, the budgetary restrictions imposed in 1995 and 1996 as part of the transition period, had made it very difficult to provide local governments with the financial means to enable them to act independently. That was why many of the issues the Committee was discussing were still centrally organized.

20. His Government was strongly in favour of independent organizations and associations reflecting the interests of Roma children and young people. Regrettably, among the 11 national and many ethnic minority groups in Hungary, only the German community had its own youth organization, which was represented on the NGOs Round Table. To date, all the efforts of the Government and NGOs to achieve wider representation on the Coordination Council and the Round Table had produced few results. The best hope now was that minority groups would begin to demand representation spontaneously.

21. One exception was unemployed young people, whose organization played an effective role in Round Table meetings, to the extent that the Ministry of Labour was often called upon to give specific answers to questions that organization submitted to the Round Table. A number of associations and foundations attempted to represent minority interests in the Round Table, but that was far less effective than having the groups themselves represented.

22. Mr. RABAH asked the Hungarian delegation why it considered that the independence of the judiciary would suffer if judges were given training aimed at raising their awareness of issues relating to the Convention.

23. The CHAIRPERSON, said that in most countries judges were trained by other judges and not by the Government. The best approach seemed to be to find ways of encouraging the judiciary to take an interest in the Convention, with the aim of persuading it to arrange its own training.

24. Mr. HERCZEGH (Hungary) agreed with the Chairperson, although it seemed that the judges' likely response would be to ask why they did not also require training to deal with other disadvantaged sections of society. Nevertheless, the Government had requested the General Prosecutor to draw the attention of judges to the report currently under consideration. Four years before it had also offered to assist the judiciary in setting up training initiatives, but no requests had been received.

25. Mr. RABAH said that the issue was especially important in the context of the juvenile justice system. According to paragraph 20 of the report, any person above the age of 14 risked a prison sentence as Hungarian criminal law did not contain any special provision with regard to an age limit for detention or imprisonment. That contravened the Convention, and it was vitally important that juvenile court judges were made aware of the situation.

26. Ms. WELLER (Hungary) said that the Convention had been incorporated into an Act of Parliament and was therefore well known to all judges. Courses on human rights were held by NGOs and lawyers' associations, and formed part of the university law curriculum. In addition, lawyers whose training had not covered human rights could take non-compulsory courses. The Supreme Court referred to the Convention in parallel with Hungarian law in cases where it was important to take into account the best interests of the child, and also published guideline judgements in areas relating to the Convention.

27. The CHAIRPERSON invited questions and comments from members on civil rights and freedoms.

28. Mr. KOLOSOV welcomed the Hungarian Government's recognition that it was not sufficient simply to state that children's civil rights and freedoms were guaranteed by the Constitution. He commended the Government's approach in stating in the report that general and specific legislation was still required in order to ensure that the rights of the child were protected in areas such as freedom of expression, freedom of association and assembly, and privacy in schools, hostels and child and youth protection institutions. He hoped that the Committee would receive an interim report on the adoption of such legislation before the end of the current reporting period.

29. The CHAIRPERSON asked what legislation the Government intended to enact in order to protect children's personal data in schools and youth organizations. In particular, she wondered whether special legislation would be enacted to enable children to create informal associations which did not require them to have recourse to banks, accountants and other such services. The enjoyment of unhindered rights of association and expression for limited purposes provided children with important training for their lives as future citizens.

30. Mr. HERCZEGH (Hungary) said that the privacy of personal data was strictly controlled in Hungary through a parliamentary ombudsman. The Government was well aware that both children and adults required constant protection in areas such as marketing. The ombudsman had created a strong deterrent effect by launching immediate investigations into a few known cases where privacy of personal data had been threatened, and ensuring that the miscreant received maximum publicity.

31. The Government actively supported the creation of informal associations among children, and hundreds of such groups existed. However, they were required to provide a certain amount of information in order to receive a grant and to ensure that they were not exploited by outsiders. There was no easy solution to the problem of ensuring that young people's associations enjoyed basic freedoms while being subjected to minimal interference by the Government. Its current solution was to provide groups with all kinds of assistance under constant monitoring, and to hope for increased support from international organizations.

32. The CHAIRPERSON asked whether in Hungarian law there were special provisions concerning police brutality towards children. Also, she wondered what measures were being taken to educate the public about corporal punishment in the home.

33. Mr. HERCZEGH (Hungary) said that although corporal punishment was banned under Hungarian law, that was clearly not the end of the matter, as it was far more difficult to monitor in the family than in institutions. The dilemma was to prove that corporal punishment was occurring in a family, without violating that family's privacy. Such cases were punishable in law if proven. To that end, doctors, teachers and institutions concerned with defending children's interests were obliged to report their findings, but the most useful thing that could be done was to educate children about their rights.

34. The few cases of police brutality towards children had been given maximum publicity, which served a certain educational purpose. Channels now

existed within the police for the reporting of such cases, and punishment was severe. Many such improvements had been introduced as part of a new police philosophy under which it sought to embrace the new society and to distance its own image from that of the police under the former regime. Unfortunately, the new "friendly" police force was now under pressure to change, in response to public concern over rising crime levels and new phenomena such as the internationalization of crime and terrorism. Members of Parliament were even contradicting the terms of international conventions to which Hungary was a party, in calling on the police to adopt a new tough approach. That might complicate the police role in ways that were prejudicial to the rights of the child.

35. The CHAIRPERSON invited questions and comments from members on family environment and alternative care. In response to the Hungarian representatives's concern about protecting family privacy while attempting to ensure the rights of the child, she said the Convention stated very clearly that the privacy of the family should not be a barrier to the rights of the child. Moreover, the child's best interests were not necessarily served by remaining in the family. She would like to know how much attitudes in Hungary had changed with regard to the concept of family privacy, especially in the context of corporal punishment and domestic violence.

36. Mrs. PALME, noting that Hungary was not immune to the rising trend of violence towards children in many countries of Europe and elsehwere, asked whether the Government had devised a long-term strategy to deal with the increasing numbers of children being taken into institutional care. It was a well-established fact that children were three times more likely to be abused in institutions than in families.

37. In the context of article 21 of the Convention relating to adoption, she noted that Hungary had not ratified the 1993 Hague Convention on Protection of Children and Cooperation in respect of Intercountry Adoption.

38. Mr. RABAH asked what criteria were used to determine whether a child should be separated from its parents, what mechanisms existed for eliciting the views of the child and what measures were taken against parents in cases of child neglect or abandonment. Were there any differences between the treatment accorded boys and girls in the family?

39. The CHAIRPERSON said the Convention stated that the placement of a child in an institution should be a last resort, foster care and adoption being the preferred solutions. She wondered what was the Hungarian Government's policy on the matter. She also wished to know if it had adopted legislation setting minimum standards for institutions and requiring periodic monitoring.

40. With regard to domestic violence, a holistic approach was necessary, involving not only legislation, but also such practical measures as removing violent partners from the home, providing refuges for women and children, revising the manner in which the police dealt with complaints of abuse, and modifying firearms laws. She asked what strategies the Hungarian authorities were employing to tackle the problem, and whether they intended to introduce the type of measure she had outlined.

41. Mr. KOLOSOV said that, in his experience, countries in transition often lacked the necessary resources to maintain adequate conditions in institutions caring for children. Moreover, problems did not always come to light because of connivance between inspectors and the commercial bodies running the institutions. The only solution, in his view, was to ensure that NGOs and members of the public participated in inspections, and he wondered whether that was the case in Hungary. According to the statistics provided by the Hungarian authorities, there were currently 136 adoptable minors. He had been somewhat surprised to see that intercountry adoption had been approved in 102 cases, and he wondered whether the delegation agreed that the figure was perhaps too high.

42. Mr. HERCZEGH (Hungary) said the belief that children should grow up in a family or, if that was not possible, in a family-like structure was central to the Act on the Protection of Children and the Administration of Guardianship adopted by Parliament in 1997. The number of children in institutional care had fallen by approximately 80 per cent in the period since the Act's adoption. His Government had introduced a system of grants, paid directly to children, to enable families to solve their problems, and to avoid the last resort of separation from the parents. Responding to the point raised by Mr. Rabah, he said he was unaware of any difference in the treatment of boys and girls in the family. Minimum standards for institutions were set out in the Act, which also contained provisions regarding monitoring. However, there was a need to improve existing practice. Participation by NGOs and members of the public in inspections was currently limited and should be increased.

43. Turning to the question of intercountry adoption, he said that, while his Government intended to become a State party to the Hague Convention, there was as yet no timetable for its consideration by Parliament due to the recent elections. Hungarian law stated clearly that intercountry adoption was a last resort, but it did not define what constituted a last resort. The principle of the best interests of the child was perhaps not adequately reflected in current policy, and he would welcome the Committee's guidance on the matter.

44. As to domestic violence, it was a complex issue, and it was difficult to strike a balance between the right of families to privacy and the need to protect children and women from abuse. The Act on the Protection of Children went some way to addressing the problem. Practical steps taken by his Government included the establishment of a number of refuges. He agreed that there must be a change in attitudes and moral values, but that would be more difficult to achieve in Hungary than in countries with higher levels of economic and social development. He hoped, however, that as the Hungarian economy recovered, attention would turn again to questions of morality, which, in the current climate, were regarded as somewhat abstract and peripheral.

45. The CHAIRPERSON said that it was dangerous to attribute domestic violence to poverty. While the problem did have a moral dimension, it could be tackled by practical measures, as well as abstract debate, and that was true even in poorer countries.

46. Mrs. PALME said that the Hague Convention would provide the Hungarian authorities with a valuable tool of reference on the question of intercountry adoption. She commended the impressive reduction in the number of children in institutions; that represented a remarkable achievement.

47. The CHAIRPERSON also welcomed the figures and would like to have more specific information on how they had been achieved. She sought assurance that the alternatives to institutional care constituted a better outcome for the children concerned, noting that, in some countries, when institutions were closed, children ended up on the streets.

48. Mr. HERCZEGH (Hungary) said that the provision of financial assistance to children with a view to maintaining families intact, despite difficult economic and social circumstances, was the main alternative to institutional care, the impetus for that change in policy having been provided by the Act on the Protection of Children. Family support centres had been established in every district and parents could apply to them for such assistance, although grants were paid directly to the child. Regular monitoring by the centres, in cooperation with local schools, ensured that the money was used appropriately, for example, for the child's education and maintenance. The Government also provided help in kind, such as free school meals, clothing, school equipment and scholarships. The scheme, which cost several billion forint each year, was financed through savings made by closing traditional institutions.

49. Mrs. PALME said she was concerned that parents whose reading and writing skills were poor would find it difficult to apply for assistance. Roma, in particular, often received little formal education, while, according to the statistics, their children were more likely to be placed in institutions and so their need for assistance was all the greater.

50. Mr. KOLOSOV observed that, of some 4,600 children placed in institutional care in 1997, approximately one third had been renounced by their parents. Those figures indicated a need for enhanced parental upbringing.

51. The CHAIRPERSON, supported by Mr. RABAH, observed that parents who abandoned their children often did so because they lacked the necessary skills to meet their parental obligations and that training was the answer.

52. Mr. HERCZEGH (Hungary) said that, in his view, the fundamental problem was the lack of solidarity in Hungarian society since 1989, which reflected the link he had mentioned earlier between moral values in a country and its level of development. Hungary lacked the necessary financial and human resources to provide parental skills training. Furthermore, schools were no longer promoting moral values, as they had done before 1989, and that was among the factors which had led to the recent rise of right-wing extremism.

53. The CHAIRPERSON said that she was concerned at the lack of information provided about incest. It appeared that the subject was still taboo in Hungarian society. She asked how many cases of incest occurred annually and what measures were being taken to tackle the problem. She was surprised that

children's evidence was admissible in incest cases without their appearing in court; that would seem to prejudice the rights of the defence. A better solution might lie in minimizing the ordeal of giving evidence.

54. Mr. HERCZEGH (Hungary) said that there were no official statistics on the incidence of incest, since the problem tended to remain hidden. A system had been established to deal sensitively with complaints, and victims were always interviewed by police psychologists who had received special training in questioning child witnesses.

55. The CHAIRPERSON inquired whether any research on incest could be undertaken by an NGO for example.

56. Mr. HERCZEGH (Hungary) explained that the greatest problem was that research was only possible when the victims were institutionalized or themselves publicized the occurrence in some way. The ideal solution - albeit difficult to achieve - was for society as a whole to assume responsibility and create conditions conducive to publicity, parents' reticence notwithstanding. While war must be declared on incest, homes could not be invaded.

57. The CHAIRPERSON said that it was time the topic was placed on the agenda and asked what was being done to change public attitudes.

58. Mr. SZABO (Hungary) said that most domestic violence, including incest, was usually hushed up. One difficulty was discovering the background, but a more important one was the mixed reactions triggered by the mass media's sensationalism as opposed to clarification of a public value system, without which the situation could only be exacerbated.

59. The CHAIRPERSON asked whether there was a consensus on the need to eradicate incest.

60. Mr. HERCZEGH (Hungary) said that while such a consensus did exist, there was none on the ideal method of publicity. The reporting of such cases usually provoked a variety of reactions, such as an immediate call for the death penalty by certain Members of Parliament, which, in turn, led to discussion of the death penalty in the light of international law. Another reaction was shame on the family's part and shock on the community's. Great care was required to ensure that the media did not portray as a sensation what was indeed a tragedy.

61. Mr. KOLOSOV remarked that incest raised highly sensitive issues. There were two sides to the coin. On the one hand, while education and public awareness were essential, the information must be accurate. On the other, excessive publicity might well exacerbate the situation and suggest a forbidden activity to those unaware of its existence. Such had been the case in Austria with the introduction of sex education and in Russia with wide media coverage of drug abuse.

62. The CHAIRPERSON regretted that undue publicity was always invoked as a reason for failing to address such problems. It was Governments'

responsibility to teach children proper behaviour and how to protect their bodies. To some children, incest was a normal way of life and while the problem called for delicate handling, it must be addressed.

63. She invited comments and questions from the members of the Committee on health and education.

64. Mrs. PALME noted that a new and positive programme for the disabled, including a Disabled Persons Act, had been introduced. She inquired whether the targets were both physically and psychologically disabled persons and what proportion of the many institutionalized children were disabled.

65. Breastfeeding had become more common in Hungary in recent years and was now practised by over 50 per cent of mothers. She wondered why it had not increased further in the interest of relation-building, nutrition and solutions to antibody and allergy problems. How baby-friendly were Hungary's hospitals? WHO had called for a solution to the problem of marketing breast milk substitutes. Since Hungary was so strategically placed for new markets, how was the problem being addressed?

66. Mr. RABAH asked whether any school-year completion statistics were available and what was their relation to child labour and juvenile delinquency. He also wished to know whether there was any discrimination between the education provided in Budapest and other large cities and that on offer in remote villages.

67. Mrs. PALME, remarking on the admission of the representative of Hungary that he had found a "good" school for his daughter, wondered whether the aim should not be for all Hungary's schools to be "good".

68. The CHAIRPERSON noted that enrolment in pre-school education, which had earlier flourished within the regular education system, appeared to be on the wane. It would be useful to know the enrolment figures and, in the event that such tuition was not free, whether families' financial difficulties were at the root of the decline. She asked whether children participated in disciplinary measures in schools and whether peer-counselling was employed to underscore children's rights in a language they understood.

69. While sex education was to be introduced into a new prevention strategy, she understood that, owing to some teachers' reticence, it would not be implemented in certain schools and wished to know how that problem would be addressed. She asked whether consumerism and media interpretation - important aspects of education in any democracy - were taught as part of the prevention strategy. What measures were in place to protect the child's right to leisure and play? Violations of that right had come to the fore in the responses of many children to a UNICEF questionnaire on the implementation of the Convention, claiming that some teachers failed to respect recreation time.

70. Since human rights teaching, which involved respect for others as a tool for building a better society, required not indoctrination but awareness-raising and greater understanding, so that they could be applied to all areas of human rights violations, the confrontational method of imparting

knowledge should be replaced by a joint teacher-student learning process. Had any consideration been given to different educational measures to attain that end?

71. Mrs. PALME said that while she was aware that Hungary was already making efforts to support Roma children, she was concerned about their drop-out and school-failure rates. It would be useful to know what specific measures and monitoring systems were in place.

72. Mr. HERCZEGH (Hungary) observed that all the questions asked touched on everyday problems facing the country. Hungary had been renowned for its excellent school system for over 200 years and had introduced new methodologies which had been exported worldwide and were being constantly enhanced by a special body established for the purpose. National curricula established minimum criteria which teachers were left to develop. They included the communication of positive values, which in turn led, inter alia, to discussion on consumerism and the role of the media.

73. Responding to the question on sex education, he said that since it was compulsory in national curricula, opponents must find a solution; one possibility was to invite specialists into the schools.

74. In Hungary it was teachers who traditionally explained a student's marks and assessment. However, in the event of dispute, students had recourse to the school council and "student governments".

75. Notwithstanding the letters received by UNICEF, the authorities had been addressing the problem of recreation time for five years. All schoolchildren in Hungary had been issued with a brochure explaining their rights and obligations in easily comprehensible language, with specific examples, including the right to recreation time.

76. The concept of "good" schools was a highly subjective one, depending as it did on many different criteria. All schools in Hungary were "good". On the eve of the twenty-first century, the best schools were obviously those already providing courses in computer science, languages and management techniques at the primary level but, by and large, the "best" school was where the child was happiest.

77. On the subject of discrimination, he said that differences existed not only between Budapest and the countryside, but also between eastern and western Hungary. The latter being closer to Austria and Western Europe, it was generally more developed. Accordingly, the authorities were focusing on the most deprived areas.

78. Replying to the question concerning children in the disabled category, he said that it encompassed all children not residing in Budapest, those not attending elite secondary schools and those attending small village schools, to which over 20 per cent of the programme's resources had been allocated.

79. Public kindergartens fulfilled an important role and were attended by as many as 87.5 per cent of Hungarian pre-school children. The main reason others stayed at home was that favourable conditions were to be found there.

Parents experiencing financial difficulties could appeal to the family-counselling service for a grant. The negative rumours about kindergartens probably stemmed from the fact that a number of private luxury kindergartens had sprung up since 1989.

80. There was a very small percentage of primary education drop-outs, although no statistics were available because many people completed primary education quite late in life and were difficult to track. However, a proposal for 12 years of compulsory education was currently before Parliament.

81. Responding to the question on disability statistics, he said that 9,400 children were currently living in institutions and received the same special attention and health care as those outside. The country's conductive education methodology was a source of national pride. A special international institution offering one and four-year courses had been established and served both as a training-ground for teachers and as an education centre for physically and mentally disabled children. It received an annual grant of 400 million forint from the Government.

82. A father's presence at the birth of a child was permitted on request, depending on certain conditions. Thus far, only 17 per cent of fathers had made such a request.

83. With regard to parent-child relations, it was encouraging that, despite space constraints, most ordinary hospitals and all children's hospitals tended to allow one parent to remain with a child during the stay in hospital.

84. Mrs. PALME, following up her previous question on baby-friendly hospitals, said that Sweden was admittedly in the unique situation of having fully implemented the joint WHO/UNICEF "baby-friendly initiative", which involved discouraging families from using substitute foods, a practice also condemned by the World Health Assembly. Furthermore, the imposition of special clothing for fathers witnessing the birth of a child was a ploy of advocates of the conservative delivery system. Fathers' dress had no impact whatsoever on the outcome of the delivery.

The meeting rose at 6 p.m.